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ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Written statement* submitted by Pax Christi International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 January 2002]

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*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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DR Congo/Great Lakes Region

The ceasefire and the deployment of the UN observer mission (MONUC) have lead to a substantial decline of tension along the frontiers of the "First World War in Africa" in the DR Congo. However, hardly any improvements since the 57th commission can be reported on the human rights' situation in the region of the Great Lakes in Africa (DR Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda). This is particularly true for the occupied and non-occupied territories of the DR Congo, which continues to be the "hot-spot" of Central African conflicts.

The war has lead to an estimated number of deaths of 2.5 million between August 1999 and April 2001 (according to the International Rescue Committee) and more than two million internally displaced persons. About one third of the total population of 50 Million of the country is directly affected by the war. Fortunately, all parties involved in the conflict have accepted the demands of the Lusaka Peace Treaties (7/1999) as the key to resolving the conflict. The deployment of UN observers and *blue helmets*, even though comparatively marginal in number, has ushered in hopes: for the demilitarisation of the militias in the East, of the "negative forces" of Rwandan and Burundian origin allied to the Congolese Army (FAC) and of child soldiers all over the territory.

The power vacuum following the withdrawal of the Ugandan army presence from certain parts of the North Kivu region, the Equator region and the oriental province recently demonstrated how essential a meaningful intra-Congolese dialogue, according to the Lusaka peace treaties, is to achieve a lasting peace. All over the Kivu region, occupied by Rwandan and Ugandan forces, the security situation has been continuously deteriorating. At the same time, the complete failure of the intra-Congolese dialogue in Addis Ababa in October 2001 has for the time being destroyed any hopes for quick conflict resolution. The official facilitator, Sir Ketumile Masire, cannot be made solely responsible for the failure. The government of the DR Congo can under no circumstances whatsoever let a meaningful intra-Congolese dialogue fail once again. Achieving an atmosphere of openness and constructive dialogue between the government, the armed and non-armed opposition groups, the churches and the civil society is a pre-requisite of peace and development, following the letter and spirit of the peace treaties of Lusaka.

Pax Christi deplores the lack of implementation of several announcements concerning human rights issues by President Joseph Kabila in early 2001. The military courts, for example, still deal with civilian cases, even though this practise should have been stopped, following the announcement of the State President. Even though the political atmosphere has been slightly liberalised, civil society agents and human rights defenders are continuously under threat of harassment by the security forces and of arbitrary arrests in any part of the country. Members of a Pax Christi group in Kisangani (RCD –GOMA controlled territory) experienced similar harassment in early 2002, when they were confronted by the security forces who made the absurd accusation that the group intended to take over power in the city.

Pax Christi International calls on the UN Commission to adopt a resolution appealing to president Joseph Kabila, to the government of the DRC, and to the governing Congolese bodies in the occupied territories:
- to commit themselves unconditionally to an intra-Congolese dialogue and engage in a process that leads to the formation of a transitional government for the complete territory of the sovereign state of the DRC
- to initiate concrete measures to stop the prevailing harassment and all kinds of atrocities committed by regular armed forces and secret services against human rights NGOs, journalists, political parties and the churches
- to initiate concrete measures to close the many unregistered jails and stop detentions without trial, arbitrary arrests, torture, incommunicado disappearances and arbitrary executions in occupied and non-occupied territories
- to introduce concrete measures to stop the prevailing impunity of members of security organs
- to cooperate with the UN-investigation on alleged massacres of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, particularly during the military campaigns in 1996/97
- to accept the nomination of a new Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DRC

Pax Christi International calls on the UN Commission to adopt a resolution calling upon the international community, specifically the UN:
- to continue and enlarge the activities of Human Rights Field Offices in all parts of the DRC
- to continue and enlarge the UN-mission in the DR Congo (phase 3), particularly for the purpose of supporting the

demilitarisation of militias, "negative forces" and child soldiers
- to strengthen the support of, and cooperation with, Human Rights NGOs in the DRC
- to bring to court the people responsible for serious violations of International Humanitarian Law in the DRC.